EXPLORING UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL EFL NOVICE TEACHERS' IMPLEMENTATION OF PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE DURING SPEAKING LESSONS: THE CASE OF EAST SHAWA ZONE, EASTERN ETHIOPIA

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There have been contentions on the significance between content and pedagogical knowledge among language scholars. The introduction of PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge) seems to merge the disparity. PCK is a special amalgam between content and pedagogy, which is unique to teachers and specially to experienced teachers. However, teacher training institutions place different emphasis on content and pedagogy. As a result, novice teachers encounter various challenges in their professional career in applying appropriate PCK in the classrooms. This study was aimed at exploring EFL novice teachers' implementation of PCK in upper primary schools during speaking lessons. The results show that upper primary school EFL novice teachers had gaps in Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK) and PCK to teach EFL speaking skills though they believe that they are equally important to teach speaking skills which they consider as one of the most difficult areas for them to teach. Hence, teacher training colleges need to provide trainees with strong content and pedagogical backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION

In Ethiopia, there have been cascading interventions to improve the quality of teachers in general and English teaching in particular. In spite of the endeavors, Ethiopia stands lower than average in students' achievements and teachers' quality (EPDC, 2018). English language teachers training and skills, as a means to improve students' proficiency, has been one of the areas given due attention by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (FDRGE, 1994). The demand for quality English language teaching is undeniable in the current world for it is a language of wider use across the world exerting different influences. The Ethiopian Ministry of Education acknowledges the roles and status of English language (FDRE, 2008a; FDRE, 2008b), so has been striving to bring about quality in teaching it through improving the quality of teachers though not successful.

Hence, training programs need to equip teachers with the principal conventional theories, thoughts, and practices of 'second'/foreign language education (Richards, 1991) and good command of the subject matter/English language because the teacher is the prime source for the students' understanding of the subject matter (Shulman, 1987). However, the initial years of teaching career are found to be challenging, especially because of underdeveloped knowledge of what to teach and how to teach. Shulman (1986) was the first to introduce this idea as Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and says it is a distinguishing feature among neophyte and experienced teachers. Hence, elementary and middle school teachers need to be trained for strong SMK (Subject Matter Knowledge) background (Cochran, King, & DeRuiter, 1991) and pedagogy. However, in Ethiopia, teachers' knowledge and skills is deficient due to inadequate teacher training on contemporary teaching methods (Aweke, Eyasu, Kassa, Mulugeta, & Yenealem, 2017; Olkaba, Hunde, Mamo, Duresa, & Keno, 2019; Temesgen, 2007) and this is true for EFL teachers of primary school, too (Dagne & Taye, 2017; Eba, 2014; FDRE, 2010; FDRE, 2015; Kedir, 2006).

Knowledge of a language is usually paralleled with speaking or conversing in the language (Folse, 2006; Ur, 1991). Teaching speaking is really demanding, even in L2 context (Hardcare & Guvendir, 2018). So, it is worth noticing how intricate it would be in foreign language contexts where there is no environmental support. This necessitates accepting that teaching speaking needs 'formal instruction in scholarly situation' (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2019). However, the gaps teachers have in PCK in actual classrooms, especially the novice ones at upper primary school levels in foreign language context, has been ignored by researchers.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia introduced a new Education and Training Policy (ETP) mainly to progress educational infrastructure, access, and quality in 1994 (FDRGE, 1994). The policy targets educational structure regarding, among other things, language skills and its teaching; the teacher training and education section emphasizes basic knowledge, professional code of ethics, methodology and practical training. ETP was accompanied by five Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs I-V) whose overall aim was improving the quality of education, teachers and their training, and students' achievements (FDRE, 1998; FDRE, 2002; FDRE, 2005; FDRE, 2010; FDRE, 2015). In ESDP was Teacher Development Program (TDP). The evaluation made by Ministry of Education after ESDPs implied no accomplishment of the aims (Ahmad, 2013). Hence, the FDRE was enforced to intervene with a program called Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) in 2003 (FDRE, 2003) and then with General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) in 2008 (FDRE, 2008b). These endeavors brought about improvement in quantity, but not the issue of quality is still questionable (ANLAS Ethiopia National Team, 2019). In all of these interventions, there is TDPs. The interventions gave due emphasis to improving the quality of English language teaching and teachers. But little was improved. Teachers' knowledge is the result of disciplined training and experiential developments. But until teachers learn from experience, they encounter various gaps in the initial years of their career as novices especially in their application of PCK. Hence, in order to fill the gaps

novice teacher' encounter on PCK, it is mandatory to assess how they implement it in their actual classrooms. As a result, the following questions were asked:

1. What PCK gaps do upper primary school EFL novice teachers show in teaching speaking?
2. What are upper primary school EFL novice teachers' views on the significance between content and methodology for teaching speaking?
3. How do upper primary school EFL novice teachers compare teaching speaking with teaching other content areas?

The general objective of this study was to explore upper primary school EFL novice teachers' application of PCK during speaking instructions. To realize this, the following specific objectives were set:

1. To explore the gaps upper primary school EFL novice teachers show in PCK during speaking instructions.
2. To assess the relative values upper primary school EFL novice teachers' assign to knowledge of subject matter and that of methodology for teaching speaking.
3. To identify the beliefs upper primary school EFL novice teachers have on the difficulty level of teaching speaking compared to teaching other content areas.

METHODS

In this study, case study design was used. This method was employed to gain insight into and in-depth understanding of the application of PCK by upper primary school EFL novice teachers during speaking lessons. In this study were novice teachers (1-3 years of experience) who taught EFL at upper primary school levels (5-8) in East Shawa Zone of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. Their classrooms were observed to obtain the gaps they show in the application of PCK. Semi-structured interview was also conducted with the teachers to assess the relative values they assign to content and methodology for teaching EFL speaking skills, and their beliefs on the difficulty level of teaching speaking compared to

other areas of the target language both of which might have influenced the ways they acted.

The participants in this study were three novice teachers who taught EFL in three different upper primary schools in Oromia Regional State, Bosat District of East Shawa Zone, Ethiopia. The intention was to include six novices, but since some of them taught at lower primary levels (1-4), they were intentionally left out. They all had college diploma from different regional colleges in teaching English language at upper primary levels. Novice teachers, in this study, were teachers within their first three years of teaching career (Choy, Wong, Lim, & Chong, 2013; Curry, Webb, & Latham, 2016; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Irvine, 2018; Sherman, 2000; Veenman, 1984).

Among the districts in the zone, a district with maximum number of novice EFL teachers was selected. Among primary schools in the district, three schools in which EFL novice teachers taught at upper primary levels were included using purposive sampling technique. Hence, there were three schools and three novice teachers with one, two, and three years of teaching experiences.

Frequent unstructured observations were made while the sampled teachers taught EFL speaking. Each classroom was observed three times, the first observation for familiarization, and the rest for data collection on the gaps those novices displayed in their application of PCK. During the observations, audio recordings were made by someone selected for the purpose. There were three week intervals among each of the observations.

A semi-structured interview was also conducted with sampled novices to collect data on experiences and sentiments they ascribe to the relative significance between the SMK and that of teaching strategies; their beliefs on difficulty level of teaching EFL speaking compared to other areas of instruction. It consisted of some general open-ended questions some of which were followed by close-ended and were tuned flexibly with the purpose of the study. This helped the researcher reveal

data that might have perhaps been obscure via observation and some casual information. They were interviewed by the researcher separately in their free periods and at the places of their preference. The interview was conducted in English and this had also revealed what their SMK looked like. Each interview lasted 17-25 minutes. During the interviews, audio recordings were made.

The data collected through observation and interview were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. Next, the analyzed data was organized thematically. The thematically organized data was then discussed together in relation to the research questions after which interpretations were given. Finally, conclusions were made and recommendations suggested.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data in this study was analyzed in two phases. The first phase dealt with exploring the gaps upper primary school EFL novice teachers showed in PCK during speaking instructions, and it consisted of two sections. In the first section, the gaps in SMK were discussed. In the second section, the gaps in binding the subject matter and methodology were discussed. Similarly, the second phase consists of two sections: the first section dealt with the relative values they assigned to SMK and pedagogical knowledge while the second section identified their beliefs about the difficulty level of teaching speaking in relation to other areas they taught. Finally, the analyzed data from each of the themes was steadied with each other to answer the research questions.

Gaps in PCK

The data on the gaps upper primary school EFL novice teachers showed in PCK was mainly obtained from classroom observations. However, the fact that the interview was conducted in English was also used to confirm the gaps seen. These gaps can be divided as those in SKM and in linking content to instructional method.

Gaps in SMK

The gaps all novice teachers had in SMK knowledge can be categorized under accuracy, fluency, and understanding content of specific instructions taught.

Gaps in Accuracy

The problems in accuracy, listed in their decreasing order of severity include:

Sentence Structure – interrogative, imperative, inverted word order (SVO), dangling and misplaced modifiers, run-on, parallelism;

Grammar – subject-verb-agreement (SVA), tense, verbs (auxiliaries, active/passive, and infinitive/gerund forms) and noun forms (singular/plural), incorrect pronoun use (subjective, objective possessive, interrogative), preposition (omission and misuse);

Pronunciation – words (with more than three syllables), minimal pairs, phonemes (/θ/, /ð/), morphemes (/-s/, /ed/) after voiced and voiceless sounds, syllabification and stress, and intonation;
Word structure and use – diction, collocation, and inflections to change word classes
Mechanics – apostrophe (omission), comma.

The following are some examples taken from all novice teachers' utterances:

T_1: "We learn what yesterday? What is poor health cause drug use? What is caused the following drug use"; "Not read name."
T_2: "What we learn yesterday? What we fill in the blank space? What is flowers we use for?
What you visit before?"; "What you like say?" "Not say."
T_3: "What we have learn who can remind the past lesson? This speaking dialogue is what? Speaking is in what grammar? What your favourite [/fəvəraɪti:/] food

says?" "What your daily favorite food or your prefers or preferred in day to day? "What is you like"; "I like say."

Surprisingly, these teachers' gaps were used in the same ways by the students. This shows how important teachers were to model correct language use, and the students' dependence on the teachers as language input especially in a foreign language context devoid of environmental support, as the case in this study. Of course, some other SMK gaps can be seen while discussing other points in the following sections.

Gaps in Fluency

In their descending order of prevalence, fluency problems identified were:
Inconsistency in use – mere redundancies, ambiguities, and stammers.
Coherence – lack of smooth flow of ideas due to absence or incorrect use of cohesive devices such as before, after, next, etc. this can also relate to accuracy. Due to the gaps in coherence, the lessons were flawed. Hence, lesson organization was one of the gaps in PCK.
Reading – absence of making pauses after comma and using chunk groups while both speaking and reading, so sentences were jerky.

In short, all novice teachers displayed gaps in SMK and didn't show disparities on the above points especially on accuracy. Nonetheless, a slight difference was seen on fluency. The SNT less stuttered than the INT while the BNT faltered the most and made long pauses /eee…/ most frequently. This implies that novice teachers' fluency improves in their first three years of teaching experiences though accuracy does not. In other words, the more experienced the novice teachers, the better their fluency would be.

Problems in Understanding Content of Speaking Instructions

The problems identified under this were misunderstanding contents of speaking instructions. Giving elaborate, ambiguous and inappropriate definitions of

speaking such as *"Speaking is the second of four language", "speaking is to talk ..."* showed the gap novice teachers had on what to teach given different social functions intended to be taught. They often went astray from the expected responses, and delved into facts or scientific explanation of the contents mediating speaking lessons. For example, in a speaking lesson entitled: *Expressing the Effects of Something*, the T_1 asked questions such as "What is drugs use cause poor health?" and translated the phrase "poor health" into a language he thought the students could understand. No sooner he asked the question than he answered saying, "Depression, the answer is depression". Other answers he gave included "… students use drug and low marks because they addictive" (Reason clause instead of condition).

To add, the T_1 was teaching "Speaking about Visit". Students were required to act, play roles and then make similar dialogue. T_1: "Have you done your homework? Who can tell me the form of *past participle*? … *Have* is form … do is verb … homework is object." (Note that this also relates to gap in Grammar). While teaching similar lesson, T_2 asked, "What is the focus of the conversation? The focus of the conversation was art gallery." The teacher's answer was confused with the context in which the dialogue was presented. More, T_3 was teaching "Speaking about Your Favorite Food." The lesson was contextualized in a dialogue about 'Favorite Fruits'. His teaching was mainly about types of fruits. He concluded: "What your favorite food? Our favorite food is 'Shiro' (stewed legume powder popular in Ethiopia. Hence, novice teachers had problems understanding the contents of speaking lessons.

Gaps in Combining SMK with Sound Instructional Method/pedagogy

Data from the classroom observations show that all novice teachers have knowledge gaps in creating special amalgam between instructional content and method. The lesson presentation methods used by all novice teachers were similar during all the observations. They entirely used loud reading followed by lectures instead of allowing students to act out, play roles, and produce similar dialogues.

Four to five pairs of students were made to read aloud, being on their feet, and the rest were passive listeners. During the lectures, T$_3$ asked more questions than the others though the questions were vague and unrelated to lessons' objectives. So, his method of presentation was lecture embedded with short questions though the former was used mostly.

Others also used short questions occasionally, asking for the names and form of the language embedded which they were not made to notice while listening. For example:

> T$_3$: "Today, we see about the…, Speaking, speaking, speaking (wrote Speaking' on the blackboard). Ok, what is speaking? Who can tell me? What is the definition of speaking and speaking is in what grammar? In what grammar we can use speaking? Speaking, in what grammar we can use? Yes? Who can tell me? … Yes, no one? (Student's name), what is speaking? Can you tell me? What is speaking? 'Natti himi mee. Ihi, (Another student's name), jedhi mee natti himi'. What is speaking? Hmm? Ok, what is speaking, (Another student's name) Ihi, (Another student's name), speaking means?" … The teacher didn't give thinking time after the questions.

Definitions can be one of instructional strategies, but those given were lingering and pedagogically ineffective to attain the objective for speaking about favorite food. Another definition given by T$_2$ in teaching: *Speaking about Flowers*

Speaking is Talking or communicated. Speaking is to say something [/sʌmsɪŋ/] about something and speaking is, speaking is let me see about speaking. Speaking is, speaking is the… the (writing on the blackboard) second, the second or the second language; the second of four language, the second of four language. That means, speaking skills 'yeroo ta'u innimmoo' second 'irratti argamee nu fayyada jechuudha'. The second four language, the second four language. In another, another speaking is, speaking is, speaking i…s the deli…verence [/deˈlivərs/] of language deliverance of language,

deliverance of language. (Wrote phrases in italics on the blackboard). Ok, in another, what is the definition of speaking? What is the definition of speaking? What is the definition of speaking? What is the definition of speaking? What i…s th...e defi…ni..tion o…f speaking? (Wrote on the blackboard). What is the definition of speaking? What is the definition of speaking? What is the definition of speaking means you can say now, you can say now, speaking is to talk, speaking is to talk, speaking i..s t…o talk, to talk or to gi…ve, to give a lecture, a lecture, a lecture, t…o speech to speech or, or, or to use, t..o u..se, use your voice to say something, so…me…things, to say somethings [/sʌmtɪŋs/] (uttering while writing). That is it about the definition of speaking, that is all about the definition of speaking, that is all about the definition of speaking. And definition of speaking, under definition of speaking, speaking is speaking is the sound or to use the sound of communication. Sound of communication. We have seen about the, the definition of co.., co.., speaking. So we can say the definition of speaking. This's eee…, that's all. This is the short of eee…, given definition of speaking. And, and eee… under this speaking, under this speaking, basic of or type of speaking, type of speaking 'illee jira akkuma kana, hedduutu jira', type of speaking 'fi' basic of speaking 'jira'.

This definition contains redundancies, ambiguities, irrelevant and incomprehensible ideas, and jerky sentences all of which had no pedagogical value. While the teacher was defining speaking, the bell rang indicating the end of the period and the rest was done in the extra time the teacher took. In presenting speaking lessons which require role playing or acting, making similar dialogue, etc., lingering definition and explanations on speaking, types of speaking, etc. is not pedagogically effective and the result was students' silence. Though there were no differences in the ways different speaking lessons were taught by the novice teachers, T_1 allowed 2 minutes for discussion during one of the lessons and the teacher lectured facts about flowers in the remaining. Giving clear task orientation was another gap novices exhibited in their application of PCK. The amount of

orientation for a given task depends on students' prior knowledge and familiarity of the topic and method to be used. However, no evidence of this kind was seen. It can, therefore, be said that novice teachers do not consider students' needs, interests and backgrounds in their application of PCK.

Feedback organization was one of the gaps among all novice teachers. These gaps included: using similar cliché for praising, lack of indicating the correct and the incorrect, absolute dependence on teacher correction, unnecessary interventions, giving unjustified correction, being selective to students and responses arbitrarily, asking for more responses from others on the top of correct ones, absence of filtering responses, etc. The praises used by all novices were only "very good, good, ok, thank you". For example: T_3 began asking: "… what we *have learn* yesterday?" S_1: "Yesterday we *have learn* about past tense … superlative… Comparative, tenses, positive, and read about passage, past perfect tense and …." (Note that the student was making similar grammatical error). The student listed everything they learned in a month and the teacher said "Ihi?" after each list.

T_3: "Enough, enough, enough, enough. What about others? Hmm?"

S_2: "The last lesson we learn about the … past lessons new words…. Originality, newness, inventiveness [/ɪn'vantɪnəs/] and eee… literature, cohesion – cohesion means using unity [/ʊnɪt/] manifest, reveal [/rivəl/] or show, artifact [/arte'fʌktɪ/] object made by a person."

T_3: "Enough, enough, enough, enough. Ok, very good, very good! From this order? (nominated a student by name), what we have learn the past lesson? Yes?

When students make errors, a teacher should not keep quiet all the time – feedback needs to be given either instantly or kept for later discussion with the entire class. If a teacher thinks instant correction is due, it is better to ask indirect correction by asking to repeat (Hmm? What? Yes…?), or by repeating the words found before the erred, or through any non-horrific means. This helps to identify if

it is error or mistake, too. But saying "enough, enough, enough, enough" as by T_3; "No", "Not say", "… say" as the case with T_2), or "Not read name" used by T_1 is really discouraging rather than motivating. This point also implies the gaps novice teachers have in using motivational strategies. In the next example, no sooner the student started expressing his idea than the teacher encroached, and finally the student was misled:

> S_1: "I think…"

> T_3: "No, what your daily favorite food, you?" (Turned to another student, as a result of which, there was no response from the student because he was discouraged). The teacher continued: "Very good, very good! (Other student's name)? S_2: "Favorite food, the favorite food I like…" T_3: Your like…" S_2: "Your like…" T_3: "Your like, your like. I like say, I like say." S_2: "I like."

Novice teachers were not consistent in their ways of reacting to students' responses. During the repeated readings conducted, especially intermediate and senior novices sometimes corrected what students misread directly and arbitrarily and sometimes ignored; they also reacted to only some students' responses. Those ignored might feel that they were right, so fixation follows. Besides, those who received correction, if they know others also made errors, might quit reacting. On the other hand, the beginning teacher didn't give feedback except uttering "another". Therefore, it can be said that novice teachers have gaps in giving correct feedback, and this gap is more severe with beginning novice teachers. Despite these, T_3 addressed students by names and called for participation more than others.

Translations can be one of the methodological strategies if systematically and purposefully used. But all novice teachers used translations arbitrarily. T_1 taught in a linguistically diversified classroom and translated into only one of the languages there though he was bilingual. The researcher personally asked T_1 about the criteria on which the he chose that language and he responded that all students

could comprehend that language though there were students with poor command of it. Moreover, the teacher himself didn't have good command of that language. Moreover, the ideas translated by the novices had no pedagogical value in making students grasp the lessons undergoing. Generally speaking, EFL novice teachers' ability to amalgam content with methodology was at its infancy.

Novice teachers' views on the comparative significance between content and pedagogy

It was identified in this study that the intermediate and senior novice teachers assign equal significance to both SMK and pedagogical knowledge for teaching EFL speaking at upper primary school levels. However, T_1 believed both as significant but valued pedagogical knowledge more. The researcher posed a question to identify why they usually used mere lecture if they give equal value to content and pedagogy. The reasons they gave were scarcity of student's textbook, teacher's guide and teaching aids in the school as well as students' unfamiliarity with different methods and low proficiency levels. Next, they were asked to reflect on the methods they used, and all novices confessed using discussion though the realities were different. To illustrate:

> Interviewee: (I used) "discussion, asking, lecture. I use discussion, oral questions, group activities." Interviewer: Did you use group work? Interviewee: "Yes, I use for 2 minutes."

> Here, the teacher considered asking and oral questions, discussion and group work as different methods. But in reality, lecture was entirely used.

> 1.3 Novice teachers' views on difficulty level of teaching EFL speaking as compared to other areas of teaching

All novice teachers believed that speaking and writing skills are the two most challenging for them to teach. Their reasons were the same with those given above, but added unfamiliarity of some topics. Based on other questions provoked

by the general ones, it was also found that all novice teachers had no any other experience before they joined teaching and knew little about contemporary language teaching theories. They all mentioned Communicative Language Teaching as a theory they were adopting but they couldn't tell its theoretical and practical backgrounds. Finally, they were asked if they had been given any short training or seminar, or conducted experience exchange and all of them said they hadn't. In sum, novice teachers consider content and pedagogy equally significant and assume speaking, along with writing, to be the most difficult to teach.

In sum, the data in this study indicated that all novice teachers have problems in SMK and pedagogy. The SMK gaps, in their descending order of severity, included: accuracy – sentence structure, grammar, pronunciation, word structure and use, and mechanics; fluency – inconsistency in use, coherence, and reading; understanding contents of speaking lessons. In fact, accuracy manifested itself in fluency. This calls upon the controversy existing among scholars on demarcating competence/usage from performance/use. From the analyzed data, it can be said that fluency depends on accuracy or accuracy reinforces fluency. On the other hand, the most prevalent methodological gaps among all novice EFL teachers during speaking lessons were: complete dependence on traditional loud reading and lecture method, lack of feedback organization, using questioning inappropriately as teaching technique, giving lingering and irrelevant definitions, scarcity of clear task orientation, deficiency in organizing lessons into coherent entity, absence of assessment, deprivation of wait time, and unsystematic use of translation all of which contributed to make lessons disorganized. In teaching EFL speaking, all novice teachers emphasized facts in the language and of the language than performing certain linguistic function using the language, so their classes were highly teacher-centered for they solely depended on loud reading and lecture in teaching speaking.

Moreover, the analyzed data on the relative value novice teachers assign to content and pedagogy shows that intermediate and senior novice teachers put equal

weight on SMK and pedagogical knowledge though knowledge of teaching methodology was more significant for the beginning novice teacher.

Last, all EFL novice teachers believed that teaching speaking is relatively the most difficult of other areas of the target language content they teach. This was due to were scarcity of teaching materials and aids in the school as well as students' unfamiliarity with different methods and topics and low proficiency levels.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The main objective of this study was to explore the PCK gaps upper primary school EFL novice teachers have in teaching speaking skills. Data was collected and analyzed qualitatively and the findings were the following. Upper primary school EFL novice teachers have wider gaps in their PCK for teaching speaking in the language, i.e., they show poor English language proficiency and strategies of teaching speaking. Moreover, they consider knowledge of the subject matter and how to teach it as an inseparable entity in teaching EFL speaking skills. Based on this, it can also be concluded that the gaps upper primary school novice EFL teachers' display in implementing appropriate PCK originate from their knowledge, not their attitudes. They also believe that teaching speaking skills, together with writing, is the most challenging for them. Based on these findings, it is recommended that in order to fill the gaps in PCK, teacher training colleges should give ample emphasis to both content and pedagogy during pre-service training; zone education offices should cooperate with colleges or regional bureau and give short term in-service training on theories and contemporary methods in teaching EFL to young children; the plan for continuous professional development (CPD) in which where *languages pedagogy* is one among the areas where manuals are to be prepared (FDRE, 2008b) must be enforced; regional education bureau should distribute sufficient teaching materials and aids. Finally, experience exchange and mentoring should be conducted among different schools and/or among experienced and novice teachers.

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